DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 606 CS 012 004

AUTHOR West, Jane
TITLE Children's Perceptions of Fun and Work in Literacy Learning. Perspectives in Reading Research No. 7.
INSTITUTION National Reading Research Center, Athens, GA.; National Reading Research Center, College Park, MD.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 94
CONTRACT R117A20007
NOTE 33p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Grade 3; Primary Education; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Student Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Whole Language Approach; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Georgia

ABSTRACT

A study explored 18 Georgia third graders' perceptions of literacy teaching and learning during the second year of their teacher's transition from a traditional, textbook-based approach to a whole language, literature-based approach. Data gathering included 8 months of observation and of in-depth interviews with students. Analysis revealed that students had a well-defined set of determinants for what was "fun" and what was "work" in literacy learning. Students' determinants for fun (personal preference, competence, low level of difficulty, familiarity, time, choice, ownership, caring audience, collaboration, ample support, high engagement, variety, and learning) aligned closely with classroom practices recommended by many whole language advocates. Despite the value that students and their teacher placed on fun, the students did not count fun as a necessary condition of academic experience. This inability to trust their own judgments about teaching and learning seemed to indicate deeply entrenched beliefs about what school should be like--beliefs that were unalterable in one academic year. (Contains 36 references and one table of data.) (Author/RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 379 606

Children's Perceptions of Fun and Work in Literacy Learning

Jane West
Agnes Scott College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS012004

NRRC National Reading Research Center

PERSPECTIVES IN READING RESEARCH NO. 7
Fall 1994

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NRRC

National Reading Research Center

Children's Perceptions of Fun and Work in Literacy Learning

Jane West
Agnes Scott College

PERSPECTIVES IN READING RESEARCH NO. 7
Fall 1994

The work reported herein is a National Reading Research Project of the University of Georgia and University of Maryland. It was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program (PR/AWARD NO. 117A20007) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the National Reading Research Center, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education.

NRRC National Reading Research Center

Executive Committee
Donna E. Alvermann, Co-Director
University of Georgia
John T. Guthrie, Co-Director
University of Maryland College Park
James F. Baumann, Associate Director
University of Georgia
Patricia S. Koskinen, Associate Director
University of Maryland College Park
Nancy B. Mizelle, Acting Associate Director
University of Georgia
Jamie Lynn Metsala, Interim Associate Director
University of Maryland College Park
Penny Oldfather
University of Georgia
John F. O'Flahavan
University of Maryland College Park
James V. Hoffman
University of Texas at Austin
Cynthia R. Hynd
University of Georgia
Robert Serpell
University of Maryland Baltimore County
Betty Shockley
Clarke County School District, Athens, Georgia
Linda DeGroff
University of Georgia

Publications Editors

Research Reports and Perspectives
Linda DeGroff, Editor
University of Georgia
James V. Hoffman, Associate Editor
University of Texas at Austin
Mariam Jean Dreher, Associate Editor
University of Maryland College Park
Instructional Resources
Lee Galda, *University of Georgia*
Research Highlights
William G. Holliday
University of Maryland College Park
Policy Briefs
James V. Hoffman
University of Texas at Austin
Videos
Shawn M. Glynn, *University of Georgia*

NRRC Staff
Barbara F. Howard, Office Manager
Kathy B. Davis, Senior Secretary
University of Georgia

Barbara A. Neitzey, Administrative Assistant
Valerie Tyra, Accountant
University of Maryland College Park

National Advisory Board
Phyllis W. Aldrich
Saratoga Warren Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Saratoga Springs, New York
Arthur N. Applebee
State University of New York, Albany
Ronald S. Brandt
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Marshá T. DeLain
Delaware Department of Public Instruction
Carl A. Grant
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Walter Kintsch
University of Colorado at Boulder
Robert L. Linn
University of Colorado at Boulder
Luis C. Moll
University of Arizona
Carol M. Santa
School District No. 5
Kalispell, Montana
Anne P. Sweet
Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education
Louise Cherry Wilkinson
Rutgers University

Production Editor
Katherine P. Hutchison
University of Georgia

Dissemination Coordinator
Jordana E. Rich
University of Georgia

Text Formatter
Ann Marie Vanstone
University of Georgia

NRRC - University of Georgia
318 Aderhold
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674 Fax: (706) 542-3678
INTERNET: NRRC@uga.cc.uga.edu

NRRC - University of Maryland College Park
2102 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742
(301) 405-8035 Fax: (301) 314-9625
INTERNET: NRRC@umail.umd.edu

About the National Reading Research Center

The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

The NRRC's mission is to discover and document those conditions in homes, schools, and communities that encourage children to become skilled, enthusiastic, lifelong readers. NRRC researchers are committed to advancing the development of instructional programs sensitive to the cognitive, sociocultural, and motivational factors that affect children's success in reading. NRRC researchers from a variety of disciplines conduct studies with teachers and students from widely diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 classrooms. Research projects deal with the influence of family and family-school interactions on the development of literacy; the interaction of sociocultural factors and motivation to read; the impact of literature-based reading programs on reading achievement; the effects of reading strategies instruction on comprehension and critical thinking in literature, science, and history; the influence of innovative group participation structures on motivation and learning; the potential of computer technology to enhance literacy; and the development of methods and standards for alternative literacy assessments.

The NRRC is further committed to the participation of teachers as full partners in its research. A better understanding of how teachers view the development of literacy, how they use knowledge from research, and how they approach change in the classroom is crucial to improving instruction. To further this understanding, the NRRC conducts school-based research in which teachers explore their own philosophical and pedagogical orientations and trace their professional growth.

Dissemination is an important feature of NRRC activities. Information on NRRC research appears in several formats. *Research Reports* communicate the results of original research or synthesize the findings of several lines of inquiry. They are written primarily for researchers studying various areas of reading and reading instruction. The *Perspective Series* presents a wide range of publications, from calls for research and commentary on research and practice to first-person accounts of experiences in schools. *Instructional Resources* include curriculum materials, instructional guides, and materials for professional growth, designed primarily for teachers.

For more information about the NRRC's research projects and other activities, or to have your name added to the mailing list, please contact:

Donna E. Alvermann, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
318 Aderhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674

John T. Guthrie, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
2102 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
(301) 405-8035

NRRC Editorial Review Board

Patricia Adkins
University of Georgia

Peter Afflerbach
University of Maryland College Park

JoBeth Allen
University of Georgia

Patty Anders
University of Arizona

Tom Anderson
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Harriette Arrington
University of Kentucky

Irene Blum
Pine Springs Elementary School
Falls Church, Virginia

John Borkowski
Notre Dame University

Cynthia Bowen
Baltimore County Public Schools
Towson, Maryland

Martha Carr
University of Georgia

Suzanne Clewell
Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

Joan Coley
Western Maryland College

Michelle Commeyras
University of Georgia

Linda Cooper
Shaker Heights City Schools
Shaker Heights, Ohio

Karen Costello
Connecticut Department of Education
Hartford, Connecticut

Karin Dahl
Ohio State University

Lynne Diaz-Rico
California State University-San Bernardino

Pamela Dunston
Clemson University

Jim Flood
San Diego State University

Dana Fox
University of Arizona

Linda Gambrell
University of Maryland College Park

Valerie Garfield
Chattahoochee Elementary School
Cumming, Georgia

Sherrie Gibney-Sherman
Athens-Clarke County Schools
Athens, Georgia

Rachel Grant
University of Maryland College Park

Barbara Guzzetti
Arizona State University

Jane Haugh
Center for Developing Learning Potentials
Silver Spring, Maryland

Beth Ann Herrmann
Northern Arizona University

Kathleen Heubach
University of Georgia

Susan Hill
University of Maryland College Park

Sally Hudson-Ross
University of Georgia

Cynthia Hynd
University of Georgia

Robert Jimenez
University of Oregon

Karen Johnson
Pennsylvania State University

James King
University of South Florida

Sandra Kimbrell
West Hall Middle School
Oakwood, Georgia

Kate Kirby
Gwinnett County Public Schools
Lawrenceville, Georgia

Sophie Kowzun
Prince George's County Schools
Landover, Maryland

Linda Labbo
University of Georgia

Rosary Lalik
Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Michael Law
University of Georgia

Sarah McCarthey
University of Texas at Austin

Veda McClain
University of Georgia

Lisa McFalls
University of Georgia

Mike McKenna
Georgia Southern University

Donna Mealey
Louisiana State University

Barbara Michalove
Fowler Drive Elementary School
Athens, Georgia

Akintunde Morakinyo
University of Maryland College Park

Lesley Morrow
Rutgers University

Bruce Murray
University of Georgia

Susan Neuman
Temple University

Caroline Noyes
University of Georgia

John O'Flahavan
University of Maryland College Park

Penny Oldfather
University of Georgia

Joan Pagnucco
University of Georgia

Barbara Palmer
Mount Saint Mary's College

Mike Pickle
Georgia Southern University

Jessie Pollack
Maryland Department of Education
Baltimore, Maryland

Sally Porter
Blair High School
Silver Spring, Maryland

Michael Pressley
State University of New York at Albany

Tom Reeves
University of Georgia

Lenore Ringler
New York University

Mary Roe
University of Delaware

Nadeen T. Ruiz
California State University-Sacramento

Rebecca Sammons
University of Maryland College Park

Paula Schwanenflugel
University of Georgia

Robert Serpell
University of Maryland Baltimore County

Betty Shockley
Fowler Drive Elementary School
Athens, Georgia

Susan Sonnenschein
University of Maryland Baltimore County

Steve Stahl
University of Georgia

Anne Sweet
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

Liqing Tao
University of Georgia

Ruby Thompson
Clark Atlanta University

Louise Tomlinson
University of Georgia

Sandy Tumarkin
Strawberry Knolls Elementary School
Gaithersburg, Maryland

Sheila Valencia
University of Washington

Bruce VanSledright
University of Maryland College Park

Chris Walton
Northern Territory University
Australia

Janet Watkins
University of Georgia

Louise Waynant
Prince George's County Schools
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Priscilla Waynant
Rolling Terrace Elementary School
Takoma Park, Maryland

Dera Weaver
Athens Academy
Athens, Georgia

Jane West
Agnes Scott

Steve White
University of Georgia

Allen Wigfield
University of Maryland College Park

Shelley Wong
University of Maryland College Park

About the Author

Jane West is Assistant Professor of Education at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia. She received her Ed.D. in Language Education at The University of Georgia in 1994. Her research interests include the social aspects of literacy learning, children's perceptions of their school experiences, and qualitative research methods.

National Reading Research Center
Universities of Georgia and Maryland
Perspectives in Reading Research No. 7
Fall 1994

Children's Perceptions of Fun and Work in Literacy Learning

Jane West
Agnes Scott College

Abstract. *The author explored third-graders' perceptions of literacy teaching and learning during the second year of their teacher's transition from a traditional, textbook-based approach to a whole-language, literature-based approach. Data gathering included eight months of observation and of in-depth interviews with students. Analysis revealed that students had a well-defined set of determinants for what was "Fun" and what was "Work" in literacy learning. Students' determinants for Fun (personal preference, competence, low level of difficulty, familiarity, time, choice, ownership, caring audience, collaboration, ample support, high engagement, variety, learning) aligned closely with classroom practices recommended by many whole-language advocates. Despite the value that students and their teacher placed on Fun, the students did not count Fun as a necessary condition of academic experience. This inability to trust their own judgments about teaching and learning seemed to indicate deeply entrenched beliefs about what school should be like—beliefs that were unalterable in one academic year.*

> Miss Rice decided to have workshops so everyone could do fun activities instead of doing work. We still do some work like spelling. In some ways, we still do the things we're supposed to do but we just don't use all the [text]books . . . . In workshop, you learn more because you get to do more writing, to use your imaginary and stuff . . . I didn't really like it the way it used to be. All you did was work. Now, you can pick whichever thing you want to, work with different people, pick your books. Everybody likes it. You get to write about things you want to write about. (Interview with Kendra;[1] West & Rice, 1991)

During our first year of research together, Dorothy Rice and I noticed that her third-grade students, like Kendra in the interview excerpt, often referred to particular aspects of their school literacy experiences as either "fun" or "work." The repeated use of these terms prompted us to wonder how the children perceived the new ways of teaching in which Dorothy had invested so much time and effort. What impact was Dorothy's implementation of a whole-language approach having on her students' perceptions of school and, in particular, of reading and writing? This study revealed that the children tended to perceive what has been called "whole language"—a label often applied to progressive, open approaches to literacy—as "fun" and what might be called "traditional approaches" as "work." While the children placed high personal value on fun, they believed that those in authority did not and that fun was, therefore, merely a pleasant happenstance.

One reason Dorothy and many of her colleagues began investigating whole language was to increase their students' interest in reading. Teachers, as well as students, were bored with the way literacy teaching and learning had been conducted at their school (Taxel, 1991). Dorothy's description of her former approach typified the model of teaching that dominated Dorothy's school and classroom before her professional transition:

> I was clearly the central figure in the classroom. I used the basal reading texts and felt that the majority of my students were successful; they always did fairly well on standardized achievement tests. Still, there was a group I worried about. Try as I might, I never seemed able to motivate or interest them. Some did just enough to get by; others did not get by. In the back of my mind I wondered about ways to provide what these children needed, what they obviously were not getting; the problem was discovering those ways. (West & Rice, 1991)

Dorothy's former model of teaching and learning fit what Applebee (1991) calls the "assembly-line metaphor" in which children exit school with "a body of knowledge made up of discrete component parts . . . assembled in a coherent, specified order" (p. 552). This assembly-line model of teaching, according to Applebee, is deeply entrenched in the American educational system and has served as the framework guiding much teaching in this country. In this kind of schooling, "the child is thrown into a passive, receptive or absorbing attitude. The conditions are such that he is not permitted to follow the law of his nature; the result is friction and waste" (Dewey, 1929, p. 224).

In contrast with assembly-line models of teaching and learning, more progressive, open literacy models involve students to greater degrees because they are process oriented. Goodman (1986), a prominent voice in the world of whole language echoed Dewey's (1929) disdain for teaching that renders children passive:

> Kids need to feel that what they are doing through language they have chosen to do because it is useful, or interesting, or fun for them. They need to own the processes they use: to feel that the activities are their own, not just school work or stuff to please the teacher. What they do ought to matter to them personally. (Goodman, 1986, p. 31)

When children do own their processes and activities, their perceptions of school experiences change. In the case of Apple's (1990) kindergarten study, for example, the single factor of who directed an experience determined whether that experience counted as work or play. Teacher-directed activities were considered work by both teacher and children; child-directed activities were considered play. Because work was perceived by participants as more important, the teacher in that classroom—as in most—held the power.

Others have used terms similar to fun and work in their examinations of school experiences. For example, Erickson (1986) uses two metaphors for classrooms: the *workplace* in which some workers (or students) have different rights and obligations from others, and the *game of chess* which is "multidimensional,

filled with paradox and contradiction from moment to moment and from day to day" (p. 133). Like Erickson, Marshall (1990) has criticized the workplace metaphor for schools and suggested that learning, rather than work or play, is an appropriate goal for educational settings. Educators' language has contributed to the perception of learning as work. Teachers encourage students to get their work done, complete their homework, and fill in worksheets while reminding them, "It is not play time" (Marshall, 1990, p. 96).

Despite objections to associating learning with either work or play, these and similar terms often arise in research that considers students' perspectives. For example, Nicholls (1989) notes that junior high school students tend to discount learning when it resembles play because they expect learning to result from routine, work-like activities. In her ethnographic study of kindergartners' perceptions of school, LeCompte (1980) found that these children divided their activities into work and play according to spatial location: work occurred inside, under the teacher's supervision, while play occurred outside on the playground where children had greater autonomy. Children in the fifth/sixth-grade classroom studied by Oldfather (1993) often spoke of experiences they valued as fun. For instance, one student, Abigail, explained that "What you want to know is usually funner stuff" (p. 678). Funner stuff, in this classroom, involved self-expression, focus on personal meaning construction, choice, teacher responsiveness to students' ideas, and having their voices honored (Oldfather, 1993).

The children who thought of learning as fun, however, were in the minority, according to the little research that has examined children's perspectives. Most, as in the Nicholls (1989) and LeCompte (1980) studies cited earlier, count school learning as work. Formal education itself may be the cause of children's association of learning with work; literacy learning is play for very young children. When they enter school, however, curricular approaches and materials often present literacy as work, thus changing children's perceptions (Moffett & Wagner, 1993).

Similarly, in Goodman's (1986) categorization of learning as either easy or hard, he notes the influence of the learning context:

It's easy when:	*It's hard when*:
It's real and natural.	It's artificial.
It's whole.	It's broken into bits and pieces.
It's sensible.	It's nonsense.
It's interesting.	It's dull and uninteresting.
It's relevant.	It's irrelevant to the learner.
It belongs to the learner.	It belongs to somebody else.
It's part of a real event.	It's out of context.
It has social utility.	It has no social value.
It has purpose for the learner.	It has no discernible purpose.
The learner chooses to use it.	It's imposed by someone else.
It's accessible to the learner.	It's inaccessible.
The learner has power to use it.	The learner is powerless.

(Goodman, 1986, p. 8)

According to Goodman, when the "easy" criteria are present, learning is both natural and fun for children. Preceding Goodman's list, Smith (1983) catalogued "Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning Difficult and One Difficult Way to Make It Easy." Making learning to read difficult can be accomplished, according to Smith, by focusing on rules, accuracy, problems, and the seriousness of the undertaking. Good teachers, on the other hand, recognize that literacy learning is complex and "instinctively ignore the twelve easy rules" (Smith, 1983, p. 25).

As this report will demonstrate, the easy/hard dichotomy employed by Smith and Goodman closely resembles the way Dorothy's third-graders defined fun and work. Students' perceptions of their experiences have seldom been at the center of educational research (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). The same is true in much (but not all) of the literature cited above; children's own perceptions about what makes learning fun or work, easy or hard for them have seldom been explored. The purpose of this study is to explore those issues *as perceived by the children* in Dorothy's class and to provide a deeper understanding of emic, or insiders', perspectives on what constitutes personally meaningful literacy learning.

METHOD

Participants

Dorothy's classroom was an ideal research site for several reasons. First, Dorothy was a leader in her school's co-reform partnership with The University of Georgia as both institutions moved toward whole-language approaches to literacy teaching and learning. She had been instrumental in convincing other faculty members to vote for school participation in the partnership and was one of the first teachers at the school to begin making major curricular changes (for example, putting away the basal readers and trying reading and writing workshops). At the time of this study, Dorothy was in her first full year of literature-based and workshop-style teaching; she was continuing to learn about whole language and to find ways of reconciling it, for example, with school district requirements that teachers give standardized skills tests and compile report cards that call for separate grades for specific aspects of literacy, such as spelling.

Second, Dorothy was a graduate student working toward her Specialist degree. The university courses she was taking provided a foundation for literacy issues addressed in faculty development meetings at the school.

Third, Dorothy and I were classmates in one course at the time I began doing research at the school. Because we were already acquainted as colleagues, I believed that issues relating to site entry and researcher-participant relationships would be easier to address. Additionally, because Dorothy had made rather dramatic shifts in instruction fairly quickly, the children in her class were likely to be able to compare the original, textbook-centered and skills-based approach to the newer literature-based, whole-language approach.

During the study, Dorothy's class was composed of 7 boys and 11 girls. All were

Caucasian, and most had grown up in or near the poor and working-class rural county where the school was located. Dorothy knew many of the children's families and had taught several of the children's older siblings. The class was academically heterogeneous. Two students, one boy and one girl, had been diagnosed as learning disabled and went to a resource classroom for their literacy instruction; the resource teacher was also a participant in the school-university partnership and used an approach similar to Dorothy's.

The children's attitudes toward Dorothy and her teaching were very positive. Members of the class described Dorothy as "nice" and "important" because she was the one who helped them learn, and she wanted work to be fun. A student from Dorothy's class the previous year shared that sentiment, reporting that Dorothy made "learning time funning time." Several children agreed with a classmate's comment that Dorothy "knows we can do good" and that she wanted them to succeed.

By the second year, when data were gathered for the present study, the foundations of literacy learning in Dorothy's classroom were the reading and writing workshops, during which children wrote stories, read books they selected, and talked with classmates about their reading and writing. Dorothy also read to the class daily from books related to instructional themes (for example, Energy, The Environment, Mysteries) which often were integrated with science or social studies.

Dorothy's primary goal was to cultivate in her students more positive attitudes toward language arts, particularly toward reading. She explained it this way:

> Unfortunately, a lot of children come to school with negative attitudes because they always hear adults say things like, "I bet you can't wait until school's out" and "Did you get a mean teacher this year?" A lot of times the media present school as a negative place, and I really want to make it positive. As the teacher, I have to create that positive environment by offering more. There has to be more there for them than just sitting in a desk doing the same old thing.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, which spanned September, 1991 through April, 1992, consisted of both participant-observation and in-depth interviews. I observed approximately twice a week from September through March, most often in the morning during reading and writing workshops. During whole-group activity—mini lessons, presentations, or read-alouds—led by teacher or students, I observed unobtrusively from the back of the classroom and sometimes tape-recorded children as they participated. For most of the school day, however, students were occupied individually or in small groups. During these times, I moved around the room or sat with one child or group, interviewing them informally about what they were doing. Whatever my vantage point, I took detailed field notes.

Understanding an emic perspective cannot be accomplished by observation alone; to find out what the children really thought and felt, I had to ask them. As Patton (1990) puts it, "We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what

goes on in the world—we have to ask people questions about those things" (p. 196).

Interviews with the children took place whenever an issue requiring direct questioning arose. Early on, I began conducting brief, informal interviews with the children, sometimes as they worked at various literacy-related tasks and sometimes outside the classroom to allow for privacy and more focused attention. Interviews conducted as the children were engaged in the classroom included questions such as, Why are you [making these books]? or What do you like [or not like] about [writing this story]? These questions provided initial insights into the children's reasons for participating (or not participating) in learning enterprises and what they valued about specific activities. Out-of-classroom interviews, which were tape-recorded, included questions such as What have you done this week that's important?; Why is that important?; What did you learn?; or Why did you like/dislike doing that? Building on the children's frequent identification of particular enterprises as either fun or work, I also began to ask, for example, What about that activity was fun? and What was work?

In the spring when the two major categories of data—Fun and Work as perceived by the children—were reaching saturation and few new categories were emerging, I began interviews with small, heterogeneous groups of three or four children at a time in order to clarify the dimensions and properties of Fun and Work. I explained to each group my understanding of their perceptions of Fun and Work and asked them to help me understand better. I mentioned literacy activities I had observed in their class and asked, "Is this Fun or Work? What about it is Fun [or Work]?" The group setting seemed to enhance the data gathered in these sessions; when students in a group held differing opinions about an activity, the ensuing discussions were often more revealing than the individual interviews I had done previously. When faced with different opinions, the children had to explain clearly in order to defend their own positions.

The final set of interviews, held in April, involved only a few individuals. The interviews served two purposes: to describe variation among individuals' perceptions of Fun and Work and to do a final member check, or ask the participants to evaluate the plausibility of my data interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Dorothy and I selected children who represented a cross-section of the class: two girls and two boys, one highly successful student, two who made average grades, and one struggling student.

I shared with the students an integrative diagram (Strauss, 1987) I had constructed to represent my emerging conception of their thinking about Fun and Work; I asked for their feedback and asked them to do a card sorting task (Spradley, 1979) to test my analytic categories. I wrote on separate index cards, each aspect of school that the children had indicated as important to them. Each child ranked the cards in order of importance, added any new items that were needed, and grouped the cards into categories, explaining the groupings.

Data were analyzed both during and after data collection by the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For each analysis session, I made several photocopies of

the data set, including both field notes and interview transcripts, as it existed at that point. Units of data were cut apart and taped to index cards. Each card, or data segment, was then compared with other data to identify categories of data and their properties, as well as connections among categories. Evolving analysis led to reorganizing, altering, augmenting, and deleting categories until a minimum number of categories explained all the data. When no new categories or properties emerged, data collection ended. Throughout the study, I conducted member checks by sharing both raw data and my interpretations with Dorothy and her students and soliciting their feedback on the accuracy of my perceptions.

Findings and Interpretation

Regarding the broad question about children's perceptions of literacy learning, the answer was overwhelmingly positive. Although no single viewpoint represented all members of the class, most of the children reported enjoying their literacy activities most of the time. As one child put it, "In Miss Rice's class, fun is everything." Indeed, my observations during the children's involvement in literacy learning confirmed what the children told me about the predominance of Fun in this classroom. The following sections of this report will explicate the specifics of perceptions of literacy learning, the kinds of activity the children valued and why, and how these systems of values and perceptions took shape for specific children.

"Having Your Way" and "Being Bossed". Dorothy's students talked about their classroom endeavors in terms of Fun and Work—capitalized here to signify the children's usage, which differed from everyday uses of the words. Fun was not simply a label they used for playing and goofing off, but an expression of positive feelings about the kinds of learning situations that facilitated their goals. Overall, and with few exceptions, the children in Dorothy's class wanted to do well, to feel good about what they did, and to please their teacher and their parents.

For the children, Fun, or "Having Your Way" depended on four major criteria: (1) having positive, constructive relationships with others; (2) having some control over the task; (3) feeling comfortable and confident; and (4) being engaged in learning. Each of these dimensions of Having Your Way had a mate in Work ("Being Bossed"), and each comprised several specific properties (see Table 1), which are explained in the subsequent sections of this report.

Self-Knowledge, Self-Image. The first dimension along which the children distinguished Fun from Work was that of *knowing the self* and *preserving a positive self-image*. In general, the children associated Fun with activities that (1) they liked (preference), (2) they were good at (competence), (3) they judged to be easy (difficulty), (4) and they were used to (familiarity). The opposite of any of these was an indicator of Work. In the following case, Tanya, Lynn, and Theresa lamented the necessity for learning cursive writing:

TANYA: You have to get used to writing cursive.

JANE: Today I heard Stan say it makes his arm tired.

Table 1. Dimensions of Fun and Work

	Fun ("Having Your Way")	Work ("Being Bossed")
Self-Knowledge, Self-Image:		
Preference	You like it	You don't like it
Competence	You're good at it	You're not good at it
Difficulty	Easy	Hard
Familiarity	You're used to it	You're not used to it
Control:		
Time	Ample	Not enough, or it takes too much
Choice	Student's	Teacher's
Ownership	Student's	Teacher's
Relationships With Others:		
Audience (Teacher and/or peers)	Sensitive, interested	Absent or judgmental
Partners	Yes	No
Support	Ample	You need a lot of help
Engagement and Learning:		
Engagement	High	Low
Variety	Yes	No
Learning	Yes, more than work-type learning	Yes

TANYA: And Miss Rice said that's 'cause you don't know how to do it.

THERESA: 'Cause you're not used to it.

LYNN: I can do it fast on some words, but on some words I have to go real slow.

In defining cursive writing as Work, these girls raised issues of *familiarity* and *competence*. Researchers have also recognized familiarity as a goal for optimal learning activities. Goodman (1986), among others (see Britton, 1970; Lindfors, 1987; Moffett, 1968; Vygotsky, 1978), points out that all language learning must begin with what is familiar and move to

the unfamiliar. Competence, or "doing a good job," was a common goal for these children; with few exceptions they wanted to succeed, to please Dorothy, to do their best. Doing a good job was closely related to, even depended on, several other properties of Fun, particularly time, as exemplified in the following excerpt from a group interview:

JANE: What does it take to do a good job?

MONICA: Time.

STAN: You gotta spend time, you gotta go over it and over it.

JANE: What about in reading workshop?

MONICA: Take your time.

BEVERLY: Yeah, take your time. You have to use your brain.

STAN: Think about it and put it in your head.

BEVERLY: If Miss Rice gives you a sheet to do, you have to take time to think about what it says and you have to take time to do it and do it *right*.

Stan's and Beverly's concerns with thought and planning were common. Debra and Heather also identified them as important prerequisites to doing a good job. Again, I asked, "What does it take to do a good job?"

DEBRA: Put your mind to it.

HEATHER: Brains.

DEBRA: And really *think* about it. Really shove it all in your head. Think about it.

The children had a system of both intrinsic and extrinsic indicators of the quality of their work. They reported knowing they had done a good job when the task "wasn't hard" and when "you like it" after it is finished. Extrinsic indicators of a good job included good grades, a paper that looked neat ("like third-grade work"), and approval from the teacher.

Personal preference played a strong role in making something Fun. If a child enjoyed an activity, then that activity for that child was Fun, often regardless of other factors. In one interview I asked about spelling, which was considered Work by many children. Theresa replied, "I don't know about other people, but it's fun to me because I like to spell. My mom always thought I liked to spell because I do. I like reading and spelling the most." Similarly, Monica explained that "What makes stuff fun is because the teacher's doing what you like to do." Conversely, Debra commented that "Making books [in writing workshop] is hard, 'cause you got to be like a writer. And some people don't *want* to be a writer when they get older."

Debra's comment not only addressed the need to like a particular enterprise, but also tied degree of difficulty to the Fun/Work distinction. For Debra, book making was Work because it was hard. Joel, too, used difficulty as a criterion in his reflections on learning to write cursive: "It's very hard, very hard. Very hard. I don't like handwriting; it's just sort of like Work to me." In another group interview,

I asked whether the teacher-made social studies and science tests were Fun or Work.

BEN: That's hard.

MONICA: That's fun.

JANE: Monica, you would put those tests in the fun group? Why?

MONICA: Yeah, they're easy!

Anxiety, nervousness, and worry were mentioned many times in interviews, generally occurring in the absence of one of the four self-image properties and always associated with Work. Ben explained why reading aloud was Work for him:

BEN: At [my old school] we didn't hardly get to read. We had to do those long books . . . .

JANE: [Basal] readers?

BEN: Yeah. We had to read it out loud. Gosh, it made me nervous!

The traditional practice of having one student read aloud while others listen fosters low involvement by students and frequently leads to misbehavior (Doyle, 1986). However, even in the best of circumstances some anxiety is to be expected, given Goodman's (1986) assertion that risk taking is a necessary and desirable aspect of language learning. Dorothy's children, however, needed some balancing influence to accompany any element of risk. For example, while reading aloud to the class was intimidating Work, reading a brief poem aloud when they had had an opportunity to rehearse was less anxiety-producing and even Fun for some children.

Control. Next on the children's Fun/Work matrix was the dimension of *control*, which was manifested in the three subcriteria of *time*, *choice*, and *ownership*. The way the children saw it, the more control they had, the better. Time was one of the children's most pressing concerns. As illustrated above, they often spoke in the same breath of the importance of being able to do a good job and to "take your time." Quantity was not the only desirable aspect of time, however; being able to control their own use of time, to pace themselves by adjusting their use of time to fit their own needs was equally important.

In Fun activities there was never enough time, but having to spend a long time on Work prolonged the agony. Children in this class spent hours, even days working energetically on projects (such as making books) in which they felt they had some investment and still begged for more time. With an activity they disliked, however, even a few minutes seemed long. When an unpopular activity required a substantial amount of time, the children disdained it all the more.

Choice was another control issue. When the children had choices, they experienced greater enjoyment. When the teacher made all the choices, the same activities became Work. Children in Dorothy's class had opportunities to choose what they would read and write (sometimes within guidelines Dorothy set, as when everyone read mystery books). They frequently chose who their partners would be,

where in the classroom they would sit, and how they would carry out an assignment. Lynn and Tanya explained it this way:

LYNN: Writing's fun 'cause you get to choose what you want to write and sometimes you can do it with partners if you want.

TANYA: How would it be fun if Miss Rice made us write just what *she* wanted us to write? That would make it not so fun. But you get to choose whatever you want to.

"Using your own ideas" was another aspect of control that Dorothy's students valued. This ownership of the process was understood by the children as an extremely important element in Dorothy's approach to literacy teaching and learning. When I asked Theresa what made writing Fun, she compared Dorothy's class to her previous school:

> We get to use our own ideas, not just go by the teacher's. She gives you some ideas, but you don't have to follow them—to copy it. This is a very unique school. At my other school last year you had to do just the way the teachers told you—and sometimes we didn't like the way their ideas were.

Beverly and Monica echoed Theresa's sentiments about students' ownership of their writing:

BEVERLY: The fun part of writing is you can make up stories, and the teacher doesn't tell you you have to write about a certain thing.

MONICA: Like, if she told us we had to write about you bringing us [to the media center for an interview] today, then we'd all have to sit there and write about that. That would be boring. And then after we got done with our story, she'd have to assign us another . . . and *she* would be doing the thinking, we wouldn't. You don't learn by doing that, see, because we need to think.

BEVERLY: Yeah, we need to think.

In criticizing the practice of assigning writing topics, Beverly, Monica, and Theresa described the phenomenon that Graves (1983) termed "writer's welfare," in which writers are so used to having the teacher do their thinking for them (handing out ideas) that they are unable to generate and carry out their own ideas. These children recognized what Applebee (1986) notes as one characteristic of effective management of writing instruction: student ownership of the writing process.

Ownership manifested itself not only in ideas but in the creation of original products, especially if there were few restrictions on how to create them. When Dorothy read a folk tale to the children and asked them to write their own versions of it, she concluded with, "*You* are the author." Sensing an opportunity to make the project their own, the students immediately asked questions to determine precisely the amount of freedom they had:

ANDY: Can we put, "By [the book's author], rewrote by who we are?"

TANYA: Could we make the pot tell the story [thus changing the narrator and point of view]?

BEN: Do we have to illustrate it? I don't want to draw.

Later, as Andy and Max worked together on their books, Max wondered about the page layout he had chosen (text and illustration on the right-hand page with facing page left blank) and asked me how publishers arrange text and illustrations on two facing pages. I took several books off the shelf near us and showed him that a variety of text and illustration layouts were used. Max considered the choice for a minute and announced, "I think I'm gonna do it my way." Andy affirmed Max's right to design his own book with his decisive, "It's your book—your way!" Indeed, doing things in their own way, owning their projects, was a high priority among Dorothy's students—a priority echoed in Goodman's (1986) description about what makes language learning easy and in Froese's (1991) assertion that students need power to "plan their own work and make decisions about how they will accomplish it . . . [and to] develop *ownership* through working with their own ideas" (p. 11).

Relationships With Others. The children had definite expectations regarding those persons with whom they shared a classroom. They wanted an audience for their accomplishments—an audience sensitive to their needs and interested in what they were doing. Children frequently took a piece of in-process writing to a friend or to Dorothy, or even to me, in search of affirmation. When writing workshop ended without a whole-class share time, Dorothy was bombarded by children begging her, "Listen to this . . . " or "Read mine!" On a number of occasions, a child who had written something during my absence from the classroom retrieved the piece from his or her writing folder for me to read upon my return.

Having partners was cited frequently by Dorothy's students as Fun. The social aspects of literacy learning (Bloome, 1983; Dyson, 1989; Rafoth & Rubin, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978) played an important role in this classroom (West & Oldfather, 1993). Having partners allowed children to "get ideas from each other" and to "do good stuff together." Like researchers who investigate collaborative learning (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, & Nelson, 1981), these children recognized that two heads truly could be better than one. During a group interview about the Work aspects of writing workshop, I witnessed a spontaneous peer helping event of the kind that frequently occurred in Dorothy's classroom. Theresa had been struggling with matching illustrations with text in her books and expressed her frustration:

THERESA: The pages are usually about different things. The sentences, like a witch drinking coffee, then she's sitting at a table, then she's sitting on a couch. But how are you supposed to put all that?

JOEL: I don't know.

ANDY: I got an idea! How about just split the screen . . . .

BETHANY: Split the screen and show half with her sitting on the couch and half with her at the table, or whatever.

ANDY: Like I did on "My Dog."

This kind of helping was characteristic of the collaborative, nonjudgmental audience stance the children valued. Being judged, particularly for more creative endeavors like writing or projects involving artwork, or even for one's skill as a reader, was cause for anxiety, whether the judgment was unspoken, verbalized, or recorded in Dorothy's grade book. When the individual and the audience shared the same problems and concerns, judgment was minimal, and support was the norm.

Partners and Choice. Despite their love of options, the children understood that there were times when Dorothy had to make choices for them, and they knew why she sometimes paired them as she did and even why they made the choices they did. Though Dorothy's students generally got along quite well with each other, they did not want to work with children they did not like or children who were notoriously hard to get along with. Tanya, one of those notorious class members, explained why she thought it necessary for Dorothy occasionally to determine who would work together: "We gotta learn to work with everybody. You don't have to like people. You just gotta learn to work with them 'cause there might be a time in your life where you have to work with others."

There was an element of risk in having partners. The children knew that some people tended to goof off when they worked together, not bearing an appropriate share of the load. Staying out of trouble was another consideration. Mike, like most of the children, seemed aware of the dynamics of interaction between particular individuals in their class and wanted to work with someone who would stay on task:

MIKE: [Miss Rice] won't choose Max and Louis together. People who get in trouble . . . . See, she don't want us to get in trouble. So she just puts us in the group that we won't get in trouble.

Gender was an issue the children related to staying out of trouble. Monica and Mike, an unlikely pair who worked together often, cited gender as a reason for their success:

MIKE: Me and Monica do good stuff together because we don't get in trouble.

JANE: What makes you able to work together and not get in trouble?

MIKE: 'Cause she's a girl.

MONICA: See, that's the whole point. [Working with boys] makes it a lot more easier 'cause they don't get in trouble. 'Cause you don't see [mimics flapping mouth with both hands] like when it's all girls.

Collaborating with a variety of classmates rather than always choosing a best friend was desirable, as was finding someone whose talents complemented one's own, and sometimes Dorothy could do so more effectively than the children. The children seemed to understand:

BETHANY: See, she'll choose the right people for us. Like if somebody's not really a good drawer, she'll pick [a partner] who's a

> real good drawer . . . like me . . . and [can] show you how to draw real good.

As Bethany intimated, another aspect of interpersonal relationships was the accessibility of help when needed. Children wanted to be able to get help easily and quickly without drawing attention to themselves. Similarly, Dwyer (1991) found that the children he interviewed differentiated between hard work and easy work according to whether they had help from the teacher when they needed it.

In the present study, however, Dorothy was not the only source of help; many of these children looked to peers for support as naturally as they did to Dorothy. One morning, Dorothy read a Mexican tale to the class then asked partners to work together to retell the story and create their own written versions. Andy and Max decided to be partners and retired to a corner of the room. Max began, "I'll tell you how I'm gonna write it . . . . What can the potter's name be? Something that sounds Mexican." He decided on a name, then recited, "Once upon a time . . ." and stopped.

Andy defended Max's hesitation to me by explaining, "When you pause like that, that's how you know when to put punctuation." Andy's rescue attempt was unsuccessful, however, and Max was still at a loss as to how to get his story started. Again, Andy stepped in, this time a bit more directly. "How 'bout this . . .," and he began telling his own story in a sing-song voice as if he were reading aloud.

After Andy had composed a few sentences in this manner, Max's face lit up. "Okay, I got it now," he said, and resumed his own role as storyteller.

In this example of peer helping, Andy acted as a sensitive audience, wanting Max to succeed. He attempted to preserve Max's image before me, offered the precise help Max needed, then bowed out. Andy did not appropriate Max's story, nor did he usurp Max's turn at storytelling. Likewise, Max did not simply adopt the story Andy had begun but was able to formulate his own after hearing Andy's example. Because teachers' time and attention can only stretch so far, children who can get help effectively from their peers are at an academic advantage (Wilkinson & Dollaghan, 1979). Instances such as this one benefit the children concerned—as well as the teacher and other students—by demonstrating that the children can solve problems for themselves rather than depend on the teacher to rescue them at every point of potential difficulty.

Having needed support contributed to Fun; needing a lot of support, however, made a task Work. For instance, Joel classified social studies worksheets as Work because "You gotta ask for everything. It's real hard." When children chose books too difficult for them, they did not attempt to extend their time with the book as they would a Fun activity. Instead, they frequently "cheated" on their reading logs in order to minimize the time spent on that book and move on to another, more manageable one.[2]

Engagement and Learning. These children liked activities they could "really get into," ones in which they could involve themselves deeply with as few constraints as possible. Reading workshop, with its extended time for independent reading, was a favored activity among many of the children, who agreed with

Monica that "the fun part is where you can read as much as you can and you don't have to get a certain thing done." Another valued aspect of reading workshop, according to Debra, was the opportunity to read longer "chapter books":

> Reading chapter books is fun 'cause if you read little picture books, you just get half the story; if you read chapter books you get the whole story . . . . Writing chapter books is fun, too. Me and Monica's writing a chapter book now together, and if people come over to the book basket that we put our books we made in and they pick out a chapter book, they'll get more of the story than just a plain old picture book.

How did the children resolve this desire for "the whole story" with their admitted practice of cheating on their reading logs in order to be rid of a book? First, children had different ideas about reading. Most of those who wanted more opportunity to engage in reading were not the same children who frequently abandoned books. Although most of Dorothy's students claimed to enjoy reading and indeed demonstrated that enjoyment during my observations, there were two or three who did not like to read and who classified reading as Work.

Second, even children who placed reading at the top of their Fun lists occasionally made a poor choice, selecting a book that was too difficult for them or that simply did not interest them. This was the reason for most of the cheating. These children were not avoiding reading, but trying to switch more quickly to a book that would be Fun.

The elements of time and competence were closely related to engagement. If an activity was generally considered Fun, then the children were more likely to want to spend time on it, to be concerned with doing their best, and to become highly engaged. If the activity was otherwise disliked, however, complexity and involvement were undesirable. For instance, the children rarely considered homework Fun; consequently, they wanted homework that required little effort, time, or thought. Homework could become Fun, though, when there was just a little to do.

Another activity that the children almost always tried to minimize was writing sentences for a language arts lesson. Although Dorothy rarely used this assignment, her student teacher chose it several times on days I was present. When I first visited Dorothy's classroom in October, Billy, the student teacher, was at the chalkboard writing sentences the children were busily copying. Billy directed them, "Write the sentence, underline the verb, and tell whether the tense is past, present, or future." As they wrote the following talk ensued:

LYNN: Do we have to write the whole sentence?

BILLY: Yes.

BEN: Can we abbreviate past, present, and future?

BILLY: No, write the whole word.

DEBRA: How many sentences are we gonna have?

Billy then read the five sentences aloud and explained the directions again.

BEN: Do we have to write the sentences?

THERESA: Can we just circle the verb?

STAN: I don't understand.

This kind of negotiating to minimize an activity occurred frequently with enterprises the children regarded as Work. With Fun, however, the children negotiated to extend the task, asking for more time to write, groaning when Dorothy announced the end of reading workshop and once even complaining that lunch came too early.

Variety, a quality of whole language mentioned often by Goodman (1986), also added to engagement. For example, the children generally classified any activity that required the use of textbooks as Work. (Although Dorothy seldom used textbooks, the children still associated them with the daily routines of previous classes.) The variety in working with different partners, reading different kinds of trade books, and participating in unusual activities were all perceived as Fun.

The absence of variety was a criterion for Work, but while variety was desirable, new and unfamiliar tasks could cause anxiety. The children liked some consistency so that they could become "used to" how their classroom worked. Max revealed that this was a pressing concern for him: "Sometimes I don't like [an assignment] at first, then I get used to it and I get to like it; then there's nothing to worry about."

Learning. The final property on the children's Fun/ Work matrix was *learning*—the one characteristic commonly and simultaneously associated with both Fun and Work. Learning was a natural by-product of Fun, desirable but not a primary motive for participating. According to Monica, "You learn more when you make choices and think for yourself." Both making choices and thinking for yourself were characteristics of Fun; thus, for Monica Fun resulted in more authentic learning than did Work.

The kind of learning that the children associated with Work was the obligatory "good for you" kind of learning—like the medicine we take on doctor's orders because we should, though we'd really rather not. As Ben put it, "If we don't do some hard stuff [Work], we'll never learn." Unlike Monica, Ben did not seem to see a strong association between Fun and learning.

Individual Variation. Each child evaluated and applied the criteria for Fun and Work differently. Monica, for example, valued ownership and choice most. She was likely to sacrifice quality—to "slop down something"—if she did not feel ownership of the work. Using her imagination, generating story ideas, and thinking for herself were Monica's priorities. When those qualities were present in an enterprise such as writing workshop, Monica was willing to forego some of the other dimensions of Fun, such as having a partner or an easy assignment.

Monica did report valuing competence, but this was for extrinsic reasons: "Daddy wants me to make good grades, and you have to make good grades to get a good degree when

you grow up." Many times I saw Monica forfeit free time or ask permission to do her homework during recess so her father would believe she had worked hard that day. Learning and competence, however, appear distinct for Monica; while she seemed to value competence for extrinsic reasons, her value of learning was intrinsically constructed. She told me in an individual interview that learning was important to her, "'Cause I just *want* to learn. I want to know all the stuff other kids do."

Other students valued the same properties of Fun and devalued Work but prioritized the properties differently to suit themselves and their situations. Tasks were perceived by individual children as mostly Fun, mostly Work, or a balanced mix. When alignment between the particular dimensions of Fun a child valued most highly and those embodied in an activity was close, the activity was Fun for that child.

Intrinsically and Extrinsically Determined Values. Although Goodman (1986) calls for motivation always to be intrinsic, extrinsically derived values in this case played a definite role in the formation of the children's perceptions. There are times when even students with high internal motivation need that extra push from some external source (Oldfather, 1991). In this study, some of the dimensions of the children's definitions of Fun and Work were generated intrinsically by the children; others were, in the children's perceptions, imposed externally. For example, an intrinsically-derived criterion for knowing when you had done a good job (part of Fun) was a sense of satisfaction with the completed product or process. Extrinsic criteria included response from the teacher as well as grades. Both kinds of criteria shaped a child's sense of competence (Fun) or incompetence (Work) at a particular task.

When I asked the children why they participated in particular activities, their sole intrinsically derived reason was Fun. They were able to maintain a positive self-image, to have some control, to experience positive, supportive relationships with others, and to be highly engaged in learning. If the activity was not perceived as Fun, their reasons for participating were external and had to do with avoiding punishment, demonstrating for Dorothy what they could do, getting grades, and doing what was "good" for them. Most of the children, however, could not articulate a specific reason for the activities in which they engaged. There was often a general sense of inevitability in their comments, for example, "Miss Rice makes a list every week of the activities we're gonna do [her lesson plans] . . . and if it's in her plans, we do it." Some children said, "She told us to." A few said they participated "because you learn." This response may have been a repetition of parents' or teachers' comments about the value of school rather than a real reason for participation; the children tended to regard learning as a by-product rather than a goal of participation.

A contradiction occurred when what children themselves valued most highly (intrinsic) differed from what they believed Dorothy or their parents valued most highly (extrinsic). Although the children's conversations with me and their actions in the classroom clearly indicated a primary concern for "doing the fun stuff," many of them flatly denied that having Fun was important. As Monica explained:

> There's laws that you have to have lunch, you have to have science, but there's no laws that say you have to have fun. 'Course it would be nice to have fun, but we don't really need it. We don't *have* to have it. And plus, Miss Rice plans stuff fun anyway.

Monica's comments indicated that, although she valued Fun, which she subsequently admitted, what others, in this case lawmakers, considered important superseded her own opinions. A finding of Apple and King (1990) echoes this tension between what children value personally and what they perceive to be valued by adults. In their study of a kindergarten class, Apple and King found that the teacher and students conceptualized their activity in two categories: work and play. For teacher and children, work was reportedly more important. They associated learning only with work; play was seen as an extra, a privilege if there was time and if it did not disrupt the work. All teacher-directed activities, regardless of type, were seen as work. With work, the teacher told the children what to do and how to do it; their few choices were insignificant (e.g., whether to make black, brown, or gray horses). Everyone was required to do the same work at the same time; the goal for work was to get it done rather than to do it particularly well. In his review of students' tasks, Doyle (1986) noted the same phenomenon:

> Accountability plays a key role in determining the value or significance of work in a classroom: Products that are evaluated strictly by the teacher are more likely to be seen as serious work, that is, work that "counts." (p. 406)

Another example of children's perceptions that their own values conflict with "official" ones (in this case Dorothy's), was Theresa's assertion that "spelling is important to Miss Rice, but not to me." Conversations about grades yielded similar comments:

JANE: How important are grades in Miss Rice's room?

LYNN: *Very* important! 'Cause if you get high grades, you pass third grade and won't be in third grade one more year.

JANE: How important are grades to Miss Rice?

LYNN: Very.

TANYA: They're not that important. 'Cause she wants to make work fun, and she knows you're gonna do good if you want to.

LYNN: She wants us to go up to fourth grade.

Lynn valued grades because she believed her teacher did and because she knew they were the keys to progressing through school. Tanya believed that Dorothy wanted her students to succeed and that she valued those intrinsic motivations that were more important to the children than grades.

Ironically, while Dorothy herself attached little value to grades, she was bound by the same reality as Lynn: grades were required—important in the system. For example, Dorothy tried to place emphasis on the children's ideas and the content of their writing rather than on surface features such as spelling and handwriting. Theresa's comment that "spelling is im-

portant to Miss Rice but not to me," and Monica's remark, "Neatness; that's what school is mostly about—learning and handwriting" both demonstrated perceptions of Dorothy's priorities that were different from those she tried to convey.

While this difference in perception may not be surprising, it has notable implications. Because the children perceived these differences, they often appeared to make "expected" comments about extrinsic values they believed people in authority deemed important while subordinating their own intrinsically generated opinions as less important. Thus, while many children explained that both Fun and Work were important when gauged by external criteria, they clearly attached greater *personal* value to Fun.

DISCUSSION

The phenomena examined in this study can be summarized in two key statements of finding. First, the children had good instincts. What they most valued intrinsically, Fun, was closely aligned with what theorists and researchers believe to be optimal conditions for learning including, among others, time, choice, ownership, competence, and collaboration. The children perceived as Fun those aspects of their curriculum that might be associated with whole language as described earlier in this report. These children knew the value of ownership, of making their own choices and doing their own thinking, of working collaboratively with others, of meaningful and relevant materials and content, and of many other aspects of the best in teaching and learning.

Second, and less encouraging, despite this strong sense of what they really wanted, many of Dorothy's students still saw externally determined characteristics as more important than what they themselves valued. They often seemed to conceive of their job as one of doing what the teacher said and of the teacher's job as one of telling them what to do. The children valued Fun, but in the world of school Fun was seen as a stroke of good fortune—a happy circumstance which delighted them, but which they really had no right to expect. In this respect, Dorothy's children counted themselves lucky; although school was not meant to be Fun, their class happened to be that way.

Despite their own good sense about literacy learning, and despite Dorothy's attempts to help the children reformulate the traditional perceptions of school and learning to which they had undoubtedly been exposed for years, their explanations that "It's fun," but "We're doing it because she told us to" indicate that traditional, assembly-line models of teaching and learning continued to influence their thinking about school.

Two related studies are instructive in understanding the perceptions of Dorothy's students. The first, conducted by Oldfather (1991), was an examination of sixth-graders' perceptions of their reasons for being involved in learning activities. The students in Oldfather's study held values very similar to those of Dorothy's students. Her participants sought self-expression, a sense of competence, self-determination, and the approval of their teacher, their parents, and their peers. They wanted to make choices, to develop their own voices, to work with their peers, and to have Fun. For those

children, as for Dorothy's students, preferred ways of teaching and learning were shaped by a number of complex, interrelated factors.

There were also some differences between the two groups of children. While Oldfather's participants, like the ones in the present study, experienced both intrinsic and extrinsic centers of value and motivation, the older children were far more secure in their self-determined reasons and values. Extrinsic purposes were, for them, simply "backup" for those infrequent occasions when they could not find intrinsic drive. One explanation for this difference might be the children's ages and years of experience in their particular kinds of learning environments. Willow School, which was attended by the students in Oldfather's study, was located in southern California. The school was in an open-enrollment district and was chosen by the children and their parents, often because of its student-centered experiential curriculum. Additionally, these students received no grades, and their report cards were in narrative form. At Willow, there was an explicit focus on learning and meaning construction rather than on making good grades as primary goals.

Enrollment in the rural Georgia school attended by Dorothy's students was determined by residence within its district. The school had long had a very traditional, teacher-centered, textbook-driven curriculum, but, like Dorothy, many faculty members were in the midst of making sweeping curricular changes at the time of this study. Report cards listed grades for each subject and some divisions of subject areas. Whole-language approaches were new to the school, and teachers were working to help parents understand the new philosophy. Because of the transitional state of this school, reliance on traditional ways of evaluating and reporting progress was strong. These very different school cultures, one that deemphasized external motivational forces and one that had just begun to do so, would certainly influence students' degree of self-determination and internally driven reasons for learning.

In addition, Oldfather's students reported valuing challenge in their learning activity; Dorothy's students only peripherally alluded to a desire for challenge. This apparent avoidance of risk taking may be surprising in a classroom such as Dorothy's where children seem so comfortable with learning. In fact, the students who had experienced the most success in school did like challenge and occasionally requested that Dorothy "give [them] a hard one." Among Dorothy's students, a desire for challenge related directly to the other three aspects in the self-knowledge/self-image category (see Table 1). If a learner liked a particular enterprise and felt a sense of competence and familiarity with it, then a higher degree of difficulty was acceptable. For children who did not have histories of school success, there was less likelihood of those three conditions existing. Additionally, Dorothy's goal of creating a positive environment in which her students felt comfortable led her to create a sense of security, rather than risk, for these children. Indeed, other literacy professionals, while applauding risk taking, have called for "reducing the risks for young literacy learners" (Allen & Mason, 1989).

The second study that significantly informs this one was the Apple (1990) study mentioned

earlier. Their categories of work and play may appear similar to Dorothy's children's categories of Work and Fun; however, there are some important differences. For Dorothy and her students, Fun was truly more important, though the children were not entirely able to release their perception that Work *should* be considered more valuable. Fun and Work in this case were classified according to the nature of the activity as described by other criteria, rather than along the single dimension of teacher-directedness as in Apple's study.

The children's difficulty in validating their own intrinsically determined values was addressed by Apple as well. He attributed reluctance to adopt new perceptions in place of long-held ones to his belief that "certain social meanings become particularly *school* meanings and thus have the weight of decades of acceptance behind them" (Apple, 1990, p. 46). Further, he notes that common meanings are constructed by teachers and their students during the first weeks of each school year and remain stable under most conditions throughout the year. School meanings, however, have a much broader base, which certainly includes first-hand experience but also draws on the way school is represented in culture beyond the school walls (for example, in the parental perceptions and media presentations mentioned by Dorothy). Thus, I would extend Apple's assertion and speculate that school meanings constructed before and during the early years of schooling (both in and out of school) remain stable over the years of a child's education unless there is fundamental change in the learning environment—and indeed in the broader culture—that leads to a change in the learner's perceptions.

The findings of this study underscore the need for educators to examine our own systems of values related to literacy teaching and learning. What kinds of learning experiences do we truly want for our students? Do our methods of teaching and assessing reflect our values accurately? Or do our practices belie an underlying schism between what we say and what we do? We must think carefully about our own values, communicate them with students, and ensure that our practice supports our goals.

A second implication of this research is the connection between Fun, as defined by Dorothy's students, and motivation. When the conditions for Fun (affirming the self-image, shifting control to students, building positive relationships, and engaging the children in learning) were sufficiently met, the children wanted to participate; when the enterprise seemed more like Work, they did not. Due to the close alignment between the kinds of literacy learning these children valued and the kinds indicated by current literacy research, Fun is warranted not only for motivational purposes but also for academic ones. One limitation of this study is that its link to research on motivation has not been explored fully. I believe that connection to be real and deep and deserving of consideration in future reports of this research and subsequent studies.

Educators, including teachers as well as researchers, must listen more carefully to what children have to tell us. Dorothy's students had very good instincts about the most beneficial kinds of literacy learning. Listening to and trusting children's instincts could greatly en-

hance our repertoire of means for evaluating classroom practice and making school a joyous experience for all participants. Perhaps students given long-term opportunities to experience literacy learning as Fun will be the ones most likely to sustain their own instinctive love of learning.

Author Note. I am grateful to JoBeth Allen, Lee Galda, Linda DeGroff, and Susan Yarborough for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also indebted to Dorothy Rice and her students whose thoughts and experiences are the basis of this research. This research was partially funded through a grant from the Coca-Cola Foundation to The University of Georgia Education Initiative and by the National Reading Research Center of The University of Georgia and The University of Maryland, which is supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers program (PR/Award No. 117A20007) of the Office of Educational Research and Improvements, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions reflected herein are solely those of the author.

Notes

[1]Except for Dorothy's, all participants' names in this report are pseudonyms.

[2]There were other reasons, as well, for cheating on reading logs, including competition with peers or simply not liking the book and wanting to choose a different one. There was some discussion among students as to whether Dorothy insisted that they complete a book that was too difficult or that they did not like. Some said she had told them to swap for a more appropriate book; others felt they were expected to finish each one they started. Actually, Dorothy encouraged the children to try sticking with a book for a chapter or two; if at that point they still did not want to read the book, they were free to abandon it and choose another. For some reasons that I could not determine, some children did not understand Dorothy's message. Dorothy and I suspected that some children's pre-existing schemas for school reading may have exerted a strong influence.

REFERENCES

Allen, J., & Mason, J. M. (1989). *Risk makers, risk takers, risk breakers: Reducing the risks for young literacy learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Apple, M. W., with King, N. (1990). Economics and control in everyday school life. In M. W. Apple, *Ideology and curriculum* (2nd ed.) (pp. 43-60). New York: Routledge.

Applebee, A. N. (1986). Problems in process approaches: Toward a reconceptualization of process instruction. In A. Petrosky & D. Bartholomae (Eds.), *The teaching of writing, Eighty-fifth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Applebee, A. N. (1991). Environments for language teaching and learning: Contemporary issues and future directions. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 549-556). New York: Macmillan.

Bloome, D. (1983). Reading as a social process. In B. Houston (Ed.), *Advances in reading: Language research* (Vol. 11). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Britton, J. (1970). *Language and learning*. New York: Penguin.

Dewey, J. (1929). My pedagogic creed. *Journal of the National Education Association, 1*, 291–295.

Doyle, W. (1986). Classroom organization and management. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.) (pp. 392–431). New York: Macmillan.

Dwyer, J. (1991). 'They put kisses all over your book.' In J. Dwyer (Ed.), *'A sea of talk'* (pp. 86–93). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Dyson, A. H. (1989). *Multiple worlds of child writers: Friends learning to write*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119–161). New York: Macmillan.

Erickson, F., & Shultz, J. (1992). Students' experience of the curriculum. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 465–485). New York: Macmillan.

Froese, V. (1991). Introduction to whole-language teaching and learning. In V. Froese (Ed.), *Whole-language practice and theory* (pp. 1–16). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, D. W., Maruyama, G., Johnson, R., & Nelson, D. (1981). Effects of cooperative, competitive and individualistic goal structures on achievement: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 89*, 47–62.

LeCompte, M. D. (1980). Learning to work: The hidden curriculum of the classroom. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 9*, 23–37.

Lindfors, J. W. (1987). *Children's language and learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Marshall, H. H. (1990). Beyond the workplace metaphor: The classroom as a learning setting. *Theory into Practice, 29*, 94–101.

Moffett, J. (1968). *Teaching the universe of discourse*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Moffett, J., & Wagner, B. J. (1993). What works is play. *Language Arts, 70*, 32–36.

Nicholls, J. G. (1989). *The competitive ethos of democratic education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oldfather, P. (1991). *Students' perceptions of their own reasons/purposes for being or not being involved in learning activities: A qualitative study of student motivation*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Claremont Graduate School.

Oldfather, P. (1993). What students say about motivating experiences in a whole language classroom. *The Reading Teacher, 46*, 672–681.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Rafoth, B., & Rubin, D. (Eds.) (1988). *The social construction of written communication*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Smith, F. (1983). *Essays into literacy*. London: Heinemann.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taxel, J. (1991). *The University of Georgia Education Initiative progress report: Executive summary 1991*. Project report, The University of Georgia, Athens.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

West, J., & Oldfather, P. (1993). On working together: An imaginary dialogue among real children. *Language Arts*, *70*, 373–384.

West, J., & Rice, D. (1991). "And now the day begins": Children's attitudes toward literacy in a changing curriculum. Unpublished manuscript.

Wilkinson, L. C., & Dollaghan, C. (1979). Peer communication in first grade reading groups. *Theory Into Practice*, *18*, 267–274.

NRRC National Reading Research Center

318 Aderhold, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
3216 J. M. Patterson Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742